

Madhura Bhava and the Erotic Mysticism of Radha-Krishna Devotion in Select Songs of Kazi Nazrul Islam

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Abstract— *The Radha–Krishna tradition in South Asian devotional literature provides a significant space where divinity, love, and emotional intensity converge. Within this framework, Kazi Nazrul Islam reconfigures devotional expression through a sensuous and psychologically nuanced poetic idiom. His selected songs foreground Madhura Bhava as a devotional mode in which longing, anticipation, and embodied emotion shape the devotee’s relationship with the divine. Rather than approaching these compositions merely as religious or musical artefacts, this study emphasizes their literary and affective dimensions, arguing that they construct an interiorized feminine consciousness marked by desire, absence, and emotional yearning. The paper examines how Nazrul transforms acts such as adornment, offering, waiting, and dream encounters into expressions of eroticized devotion. Drawing on Indian aesthetic concepts of *ras*., *dhvani*, *vipralambha* and *śṛṅgāra*, the study situates Nazrul within the Vaishnava devotional tradition while highlighting his modern psychological sensibility. The analysis is further informed by Judith Butler’s theory of performativity and Lacanian notions of desire structured through lack, which illuminate the formation of feminine subjectivity and emotional asymmetry in the lyrics. The study also demonstrates that Krishna appears as elusive and emotionally dispersed, making absence the generative centre of devotion. Nature imagery and dream sequences intensify interior affect and longing. Ultimately, the paper argues that Nazrul modernizes the Radha–Krishna dynamic by internalizing it within feminine consciousness, transforming devotion into an embodied, sensuous, and emotionally charged experience.*



Keywords— *Devotional Erotics, Feminine Subjectivity, Madhura Bhava, Nazrul Islam*

I. INTRODUCTION: SITUATING MADHURA BHAVA IN NAZRUL’S LYRIC WORLD

Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899–1976), widely celebrated as the “Rebel Poet” of Bengal, occupies a distinctive position in South Asian literary history for his ability to synthesize diverse religious, cultural, and aesthetic traditions. While much of his oeuvre is associated with political resistance and Islamic devotional expression, Nazrul’s engagement with Vaishnavite themes, particularly the Radha-Krishna dynamic, reveals an equally profound immersion in Hindu devotional poetics. His Krishna-centric songs draw richly upon the emotional and symbolic universe of Braj culture, where the divine is not distant but intimately woven into the rhythms of human longing, play. Through lyrics that evoke Holi festivities, *viraha* (separation), and ecstatic union,

Nazrul reimagines Krishna not merely as a theological figure but as a sensuous, affective presence within the interior life of the devotee (Bhattacharya 112).

Within this framework, the concept of *Madhura Bhava*, a devotional attitude that envisions the relationship between the devotee and the divine in terms of romantic and erotic love, becomes central. Rooted in the broader tradition of the Bhakti Movement, *Madhura Bhava* finds one of its earliest and most influential expressions in the works of Jayadeva, where Radha’s longing for Krishna embodies the soul’s yearning for union with the divine. This mode of devotion dissolves the boundary between sacred and sensual, allowing bodily desire, adornment, and emotional intensity to function as legitimate expressions of spiritual experience (Dehejia 58). Nazrul inherits and transforms this

tradition by infusing it with a modern sensibility, foregrounding the feminine voice as a site where devotion becomes deeply internalized, psychological, and sensuously articulated.

Building upon this devotional and aesthetic lineage, Nazrul's Krishna-centric lyrics reveal a striking range of emotional registers that move fluidly between celebration, surrender, and aching separation. In songs such as “ব্রজ গোপী খেলে হোরী” (“The maidens of Braj play Holi”), Krishna appears as a playful and bodily ecstasy and the colours of love. The imagery of glances as “sharp arrows” and bodies trembling in *আবেশ* (passionate trance) foregrounds a deeply embodied devotional experience, where erotic play is inseparable from spiritual expression (Dehejia 61). Here, *Madhura Bhava* manifests not as one's own longing but as a collective, festive energy, aligning with classical Vaishnavite aesthetics while retaining Nazrul's lyrical intensity.

In contrast, the tone shifts in “হারিয়ে গেছে ব্রজের কানাই” (“The Kanai of Braj is lost”), where Krishna's departure to Dwaraka evokes a profound sense of *বিরহ* (separation). The absence of the flute, the *বন* (forest), and the pastoral world signals not merely spatial loss but the erosion of intimate divinity. The lament, “ওরে বৃন্দাবনের গোপালকে কি মানায় রাজার বেশে?” (“Does the cowherd of Vrindavan suit the attire of a king?”), suggests a resistance to institutional or regal representations of Krishna, privileging instead the emotionally accessible beloved (Bhattacharya 118). Similarly, in devotional appeals like “হে গোবিন্দ রাখ চরণে” (“O Govinda, keep us at your feet”), Nazrul invokes a posture of surrender, emphasizing divine grace and *মানবিক অসহায়তা* (human vulnerability), thus extending beyond *Madhura Bhava* into other *bhakti* modes.

Yet, across these variations, a consistent pattern emerges: Krishna is alternately present, absent, playful and elusive, while the devotee's voice, often feminized, remains emotionally invested and expressive. This dynamic prepares the ground for a more interiorized exploration of longing, where devotion becomes intertwined with desire, and the sacred is experienced through the sensual depths of the self.

Despite the richness and diversity of Kazi Nazrul Islam's Krishna-centric compositions, critical attention has largely remained confined to their musical excellence or their placement within devotional traditions. Nazrul's songs are frequently approached as performative pieces within the canon of Bengali music or as expressions of generalized *bhakti* sentiment. However, such readings often overlook the deeply interiorized and sensuous dimensions of these

lyrics, particularly the ways in which they construct a feminine subjectivity that is emotionally complex, desiring, and self-articulating. The Radha-Krishna dynamic in Nazrul, therefore, demands to be revisited not merely as theological allegory but as a nuanced exploration of affect, embodiment, and longing.

This gap becomes especially evident when one turns to lyrics such as “ওরে নীল যমুনার জল! বল রে মোরে বল” (“O blue waters of the Yamuna, tell me, tell me”), where the speaking voice moves restlessly across space, asking, “কোথায় ঘনশ্যাম / আমার কৃষ্ণ ঘনশ্যাম” (“Where is my Ghanshyam, my Krishna?”). The repeated questioning, the movement from “ব্রজধাম” (“the land of Braj”) to “মথুরা” and “দ্বারকা”, and the haunting absence of response transform devotion into an anxious, searching consciousness. Here, longing is not abstract but spatially and emotionally embodied, revealing a subject who is actively engaged in the pursuit of the divine beloved.

A similar interiorization is visible in “প্রিয় এমন রাত যেন যায় না বৃথাই” (“Let not such a dear night pass in vain”), where the act of waiting becomes ritualized through adornment and *জাগরণ* (wakefulness). The speaker prepares herself, “পরি চাঁপা ফুলের শাড়ি” (“I wear a champa-flower sari”), “জ্বালি আঁখি প্রদীপ” (“I light the lamp of my eyes”), transforming anticipation into a sensuous devotional practice. The external gestures of preparation mirror an inward intensification of desire, suggesting that devotion is experienced through the body as much as through faith.

The third lyric, “মোর ঘুমঘোরে এলে মনোহর” (“In my drowsy sleep you came, O Enchanter”), further complicates this dynamic by situating union within the liminal space of dream. The intimate moment, “চুপি চুপি চুমিলে নয়ন” (“you softly kissed my eyes”), dissolves upon waking into loss and uncertainty, leaving behind a heightened awareness of absence. Across these songs, Nazrul articulates a poetics where devotion is inseparable from desire, and where the feminine voice emerges as a site of sensuous subjectivity, emotional depth, and unfulfilled longing, an aspect that remains insufficiently explored in existing scholarship.

Extending this reading of longing, ritualized waiting and dream-like union, the study asks: how does Kazi Nazrul Islam construct *Madhura Bhava* as a space where devotion and sensual subjectivity converge? In what ways does the feminine voice articulate desire through acts of searching, adornment, and intimate encounter, while simultaneously confronting absence and loss? How do these lyrics transform external devotional gestures into inward emotional intensities, thereby reconfiguring the Radha-

Krishna dynamic as a deeply interior and embodied experience? By focusing on imagery, voice, and affective progression, this inquiry seeks to move beyond purely musical or devotional readings toward a literary understanding of sensuous bhakti. The following section, therefore, outlines the interpretive framework and critical approach through which these dimensions will be examined in detail.

II. READING THE LYRICS: APPROACH AND CONCEPTUAL BEARINGS

This study proceeds through a close textual reading of selected lyrics by Kazi Nazrul Islam, attending carefully to diction, imagery, voice, and affective movement. Rather than treating the songs as primarily musical compositions or generalized devotional expressions, the analysis foregrounds their poetic textures, tracing how meaning emerges waiting, spatial movement and sensuous detail. The aim is to read the lyrics as sites where emotional experience is structured and articulated, allowing the Radha–Krishna dynamic to be understood as an interior, evolving process rather than a fixed theological motif.

The primary interpretive framework guiding this reading is Madhura Bhava, situated within the broader Bhakti Movement. Traditionally articulated in Vaishnava theology, particularly in Rupa Goswami's *Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu*, Madhura Bhava conceptualizes the devotee's relationship with the divine in terms of erotic love, where longing, union, and separation become modes of spiritual realization (De 214). This framework is further elaborated in the lyrical tradition of Jayadeva, where Radha's প্রেম (love) for Krishna embodies an intense fusion of the sensual and the sacred, rendering desire itself a legitimate pathway to the divine (Miller 32). These classical articulations provide the conceptual grounding through which Nazrul's lyrics are approached.

To deepen this reading, the study also engages two Western theoretical perspectives. Judith Butler's notion of performativity is useful in understanding how the feminine voice in the lyrics is constituted through repeated acts, adorning the body, waiting, calling and remembering, thereby producing a gendered devotional subject (Butler 25). Simultaneously, Roland Barthes' reflections in *A Lover's Discourse* illuminate the fragmented, repetitive language of longing, where the speaking subject is suspended between presence and absence, continually rearticulating desire through address and silence (Barthes 37).

Together, these frameworks enable a reading of Nazrul's songs as layered texts where *Madhura Bhava* is not

merely inherited but reconfigured. The convergence of Vaishnavite aesthetics and modern theoretical insights allows the lyrics to be examined as complex articulations of sensuous devotion, embodied longing, and feminine interiority.

Extending this interpretive framework, the study selectively draws upon feminist and performative perspectives to further illuminate the construction of the feminine devotional voice in the selected lyrics. Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity becomes particularly relevant in reading repeated acts such as waiting, adorning, calling, and remembering as constitutive practices through which the speaking subject comes into being. In lyrics such as “প্রিয় এমন রাত যেন যায় না বৃথাই” (“Let not such a dear night pass in vain”), the preparation of the body, wearing the sari, lighting the “lamp of the eyes,” arranging offerings—can be read not merely as devotional gestures but as performative acts that produce a gendered subject oriented toward desire and expectation (Butler 33). The feminine voice, therefore, is not pre-given but emerges through these reiterated acts of anticipation and emotional investment.

At the same time, Adrienne Rich's insights into emotional dependency and relational longing help frame the asymmetrical dynamic between the desiring subject and the elusive beloved. In “ওরে নীল যমুনার জল! বল রে মোরে বল” (“O blue waters of the Yamuna, tell me, tell me”), the persistent questioning, “Where is my Krishna?”, reveals a subject whose identity is deeply anchored in the search for the other, exposing a structure of longing that is both empowering and precarious (Rich 45). Similarly, in “মোর ঘুমঘোরে এলে মনোহর” (“In my drowsy sleep you came, O Enchanter”), the fleeting intimacy of dream and the subsequent awakening into absence underscore the instability of fulfilment, reinforcing a cycle of desire that remains unresolved.

Within this framework, the scope of the study remains deliberately focused. It does not attempt a comprehensive survey of Nazrul's entire Krishna corpus, nor does it engage with musical composition, performance practice, or historical reception. Instead, it concentrates on the selected lyrics as literary texts, examining how imagery, voice, and affective progression articulate a sensuous mode of devotion grounded in *Madhura Bhava*. By foregrounding the interplay of longing, embodiment, and absence, the analysis seeks to demonstrate how Nazrul reconfigures the Radha–Krishna dynamic into a site of feminine interiority and emotional complexity.

Complementing these feminist and performative readings, the study also draws upon Indian aesthetic and

philosophical frameworks to deepen its understanding of devotional subjectivity. Within the Vaishnavite tradition of the Bhakti Movement, Madhura Bhava is closely aligned with the concept of *śṛṅgāra* rasa as elaborated in Bharata Muni's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, where erotic emotion, in its refined and aestheticized form, becomes a vehicle for transcendence (Bharata 6.33). Later Vaishnava theologians such as Rupa Goswami further develop this into a devotional aesthetic, wherein *viraha* (separation) intensifies emotional *anubhava* (experience), transforming longing into a heightened mode of spiritual realization (Haberman 89). This framework allows desire, adornment, and emotional vulnerability to function not as distractions but as essential pathways to divine intimacy. In the selected lyrics, acts of waiting, dreaming, and searching can thus be read as manifestations of rasa-experience, where the individual self is aesthetically and affectively oriented toward the divine beloved.

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A close reading of the selected lyrics reveals how imagery, voice, and emotional progression work together to construct a layered experience of Madhura Bhava. In “ওরে নীল যমুনার জল! বল রে মোরে বল” (“O blue waters of the Yamuna, tell me, tell me”), the imagery is spatial and fluid, moving across Braj, Mathura and Dwaraka. This shifting geography mirrors an unsettled consciousness, where the speaking voice is driven by inquiry and displacement. The repeated address to the নদী (river) externalizes longing, transforming nature into a *sakshi* (witness) of absence. The emotional progression here aligns with the intensification of *viraha*, where separation produces heightened awareness and continuous articulation of desire, resonating with Vaishnava aesthetic formulations of longing as a generative state (Haberman 92).

In contrast, “প্রিয় এমন রাত যেন যায় না বৃথাই” (“Let not such a dear night pass in vain”) organizes its imagery around preparation and stillness. Objects such as the sari, sandal paste, and lamp are not merely decorative but function as extensions of the self, marking a transition from outer ritual to inner anticipation. The voice here is composed yet charged, suspended between আশা

(expectation) and uncertainty. This gradual intensification reflects a performative construction of subjectivity, where repeated acts of adornment and waiting produce a gendered, desiring self (Butler 38). The emotional movement remains anticipatory, never reaching fulfilment, thereby sustaining the tension essential to *Madhura Bhava*.

The third lyric, “মোর ঘুমঘোরে এলে মনোহর” (“In my drowsy sleep you came, O Enchanter”), introduces a shift into a liminal register where imagery becomes tactile and intimate. The act of touching, kissing, and adorning unfolds within the dream, suggesting a momentary realization of desire. However, the voice fractures upon waking, and the emotional progression moves abruptly from union to loss. This fragmentation echoes the structure of longing described in Roland Barthes' reflections on the lover's discourse, where fulfilment is fleeting and continually deferred (Barthes 41). Across these lyrics, Nazrul orchestrates a movement from search to anticipation to ephemeral union, demonstrating how imagery and voice together sustain an ongoing, unresolved experience of sensuous devotion.

III. MADHURA BHAVA AS DEVOTIONAL EROTICS

Madhura Bhava designates a devotional mode in which the relationship between the devotee and the divine is imagined through the intimate dynamics of lover and beloved. Within the Vaishnavite stream of the Bhakti Movement, this bhava is regarded as the most intense and interiorized form of devotion, as it permits the devotee to experience union, longing, jealousy, and fulfillment in deeply affective and embodied terms. Theological articulations by Rupa Goswami systematize this mode through the language of rasa, where *śṛṅgāra* (erotic sentiment) becomes a vehicle for spiritual realization, especially in its dual movement between *sambhoga* (union) and *vipralambha* (separation) (De 219). Similarly, the aesthetic theory of Bharata Muni locates *śṛṅgāra rasa* as the king of *rasas*, emphasizing its capacity to transform sensory experience into aesthetic transcendence (Bharata 6.35).

In Nazrul's lyrics, this devotional erotics is neither merely symbolic nor purely theological; rather, it is lived through sensuous imagery, bodily awareness, and emotional fluctuation. The beloved Krishna is approached not as an abstract deity but as an intimately desired presence, whose absence or fleeting appearance structures the devotee's inner world. This aligns with Roland Barthes' notion of the lover's discourse, where desire is sustained through repetition, fragmentation, and the continual deferral of fulfilment (Barthes 47). The speaking subject in such a

discourse exists in a state of oscillation, mirroring the *Madhura Bhava* dynamic of longing and anticipation.

At the same time, Simone de Beauvoir's reflections on desire and relational identity illuminate how the self is constituted through its orientation toward the other, often producing asymmetrical structures of emotional dependence (Beauvoir 683). In the context of devotional erotics, this asymmetry does not diminish spiritual experience but intensifies it, as the devotee's vulnerability becomes a mode of surrender.

Thus, *Madhura Bhava* emerges as a complex fusion of aesthetic theory, devotional practice, and psychological experience, where the sacred is accessed through the sensuous, and desire itself becomes a pathway to transcendence.

In the selected lyrics, Kazi Nazrul Islam reconfigures *Madhura Bhava* by merging devotion (*bhakti*) with sensuous imagery, thereby dissolving the conventional boundary between spiritual reverence and bodily desire. The act of offering, which in classical devotional practice signifies surrender, is transformed into an intimate, almost tactile engagement with the divine beloved. This is particularly evident in the recurring motif of bodily adornment, where the devotee prepares herself not merely as a worshipper but as a lover awaiting union. The gestures of dressing, decorating, and arranging offerings extend beyond ritual into a domain of aesthetic self-fashioning, aligning with the Vaishnavite understanding of *seva* (service) as an embodied act of devotion (Haberman 101).

Such adornment also resonates with the aesthetic principles of *śṛṅgāra rasa* as articulated by Bharata Muni, where the beautification of the body functions as a precursor to erotic experience, heightening emotional receptivity (Bharata 6.47). In Nazrul's lyrics, however, this aesthetic preparation is not directed toward a human beloved but toward Krishna, thereby elevating sensuality into a devotional register. The body becomes both the site and medium of spiritual experience, where desire is neither suppressed nor sublimated but actively cultivated.

This convergence of devotion and sensuality can further be illuminated through Roland Barthes' concept of the lover's discourse, where the subject continuously articulates desire through fragments, gestures, and anticipatory acts (Barthes 52). The repeated acts of waiting, adorning, and calling in the lyrics function as such fragments, sustaining a state of heightened emotional intensity. At the same time, Simone de Beauvoir's reflections on the body as a lived and experienced reality underscore how subjectivity is constructed through embodied relations with the other (Beauvoir 673). In this context, the devotee's body is not passive but actively

engaged in the process of desiring and experiencing the divine. Thus, Nazrul's treatment of *Madhura Bhava* moves beyond symbolic representation. Through the transformation of ritual acts into sensuous practices, devotion becomes experiential and affective, rooted in the lived realities of the body and the intensities of longing.

If bodily adornment initiates devotional intimacy, Nazrul extends this movement through anticipation and its fragile consummation within the dream. In “প্রিয় এমন রাত যেন যায় না বৃথাই” (“Let not such a dear night pass in vain”), anticipation becomes an affective discipline: the speaker sustains wakefulness, prepares the self, and inhabits a threshold where arrival is imagined rather than secured. This aligns with Rupa Goswami's account of *vipralambha* (separation) as intensification, longing itself heightens the relish of union by stretching desire across time (De 223). The lyric's temporal suspension, waiting at the window, arranging offerings, renders expectation a sensuous practice that deepens inward experience.

This trajectory culminates in the dream-encounter of “মোর ঘুমঘোরে এলে মনোহর” (“In my drowsy sleep you came, O Enchanter”), where intimacy becomes tactile: “চুপি চুপি চুমিলে নয়ন” (“you softly kissed my eyes”). Here, the boundary between devotion and the body dissolves; contact, fragrance, and adornment enact a momentary *sambhoga*-like fulfilment. Within the aesthetics of *śṛṅgāra rasa* articulated by Bharata Muni, such heightened affect fuses sensory and emotional registers, producing an experience that is at once aesthetic and transcendent (Bharata 6.33). Yet the union is evanescent: awakening returns the subject to absence, intensifying the afterlife of desire.

This oscillation resonates with Jacques Lacan's understanding of desire as structured by lack, sustained through deferral rather than completion (Lacan 235). At the same time, Luce Irigaray's notion of fluid, non-linear feminine desire clarifies the lyric's shifting affects; like, anticipation, touch, loss, without closure (Irigaray 76). Thus, Nazrul's *Madhura Bhava* is not merely symbolic; it is experiential and embodied, where anticipation, intimate encounter and renewed absence generate a continuous, sensuous devotion.

IV. THE FEMININE VOICE: LONGING, WAITING AND EMOTIONAL LABOUR

In the selected lyrics of Nazrul Islam, the Radha-figure emerges not as a passive emblem of devotion but as a speaking subject whose interiority is structured through longing, *apeksha* (waiting), and sustained emotional investment. The voice that articulates desire is not merely

expressive but constitutive, it produces a self that exists in relation to an absent yet intensely felt beloved. This aligns with Judith Butler's understanding of subject formation as a process enacted through repeated acts; here, the acts of waiting, searching, and addressing the divine generate a distinctly gendered devotional identity (Butler 45). The feminine voice, therefore, is not given but continually performed through emotional labour.

Within the Vaishnavite tradition of the Bhakti Movement, Radha's longing is often valorised as the highest form of devotion, particularly in the theology of Rupa Goswami, where *viraha* intensifies the devotee's emotional and spiritual experience (De 227). Nazrul's lyrics resonate with this framework but shift the emphasis toward psychological depth. The act of waiting becomes not only a devotional discipline but also a form of affective labour, where the subject must continuously sustain desire in the absence of fulfilment.

This dynamic can be further understood through Adrienne Rich's reflections on relationality, where emotional investment often becomes asymmetrical, placing the burden of sustaining connection upon the feminine subject (Rich 52). In these lyrics, Radha's voice repeatedly reaches outward, calling, preparing, remembering, while Krishna remains elusive. This asymmetry does not diminish her agency but rather intensifies her experiential depth, positioning her as the *kendra* (centre) of emotional articulation.

At the same time, the tradition inaugurated by Jayadeva provides a crucial aesthetic precedent, where Radha's voice embodies both erotic desire and spiritual *utkantha* (yearning), establishing a paradigm in which feminine longing becomes the primary medium of divine experience (Miller 41). Nazrul inherits this lineage but internalizes it further, presenting Radha not only as a devotee but as a self-reflexive subject whose emotional labour sustains the entire devotional universe.

Across the selected lyrics, the Radha-figure is constituted through a continuous movement of searching, both geographical and emotional, where space becomes a projection of inner unrest. The shifting references to places associated with Krishna do not merely indicate physical absence but map a psyche in motion, attempting to locate the beloved within an ever-expanding horizon of desire. This dynamic resonates with Jacques Lacan's notion of desire as structured by lack, where the subject is perpetually oriented toward an unattainable object, producing an ongoing cycle of seeking rather than fulfilment (Lacan 287). The search, therefore, is not resolved but sustained as a condition of subjectivity.

Parallel to this movement is the ritualization of waiting, where time itself becomes aestheticized and disciplined. The repeated acts of preparation and anticipation transform waiting into a structured practice, aligning with Judith Butler's theory of performativity, wherein identity is constituted through reiterated acts (Butler 51). Here, femininity is enacted through waiting, adornment and emotional endurance, producing a subject whose devotion is inseparable from her capacity to wait. This waiting is not passive; it is an active, embodied process that sustains the presence of the absent beloved.

At the same time, the lyrics are marked by a quiet register of suffering, often expressed through tears and silence rather than overt lamentation. This subdued affect intensifies the emotional landscape, reflecting what Abhinavagupta describes in his commentary on *rasa* as the inward relish of emotion, where pain is aestheticized and transformed into a deeper *anubhava* (experience) (Gnoli 142). The tears, therefore, are not merely signs of *dukh* (sorrow) but become integral to the cultivation of devotional intensity.

This asymmetrical dynamic, where Radha invests emotionally while Krishna remains distant, can be further illuminated through Nancy Chodorow's analysis of relational subjectivity, where feminine identity is often formed through sustained emotional attachment and care (Chodorow 68). In Nazrul's lyrics, this asymmetry does not negate agency but rather foregrounds Radha's centrality as the bearer of affect.

Thus, Radha's devotion emerges as a form of gendered emotional labour, sustained through searching, waiting, and silent endurance, where longing itself becomes the primary mode of experiencing the divine.

V. DREAM, ABSENCE AND THE ELUSIVE BELOVED

In the selected lyrics, the dream emerges as a liminal space where the devotee briefly experiences intimate proximity with the divine beloved, only for that presence to dissolve upon awakening. This oscillation between fleeting union and renewed absence constructs Krishna as an elusive figure, whose inaccessibility sustains the intensity of longing and devotional desire.

The dream-lyric stages intimacy within a liminal zone where devotion briefly takes on a sensuous, embodied form before dissolving into renewed absence. The opening mood, “মোর ঘুমঘোরে এলে মনোহর... শ্রাবণ-মেঘে নাচে নটবর” (“In my drowsy sleep you came... the dancer moves like monsoon clouds”), signals a threshold state in which perception is fluid and affect heightened. The subsequent

imagery of secret proximity, “শিয়রে বসি... মোর বিকশিল আবেশে তনু নীপ-সম” (“seated by my pillow... my body blossomed in rapture like a kadamba bloom”), renders union tactile yet fragile, unfolding in a space neither fully real nor wholly imagined. This accords with Sigmund Freud’s view of dreams as sites where repressed wishes attain symbolic fulfilment, even as they remain structurally unstable (Freud 150).

Crucially, the lyric reframes devotional offering through intimate appropriation: “মোর ফুলবনে ছিল যত ফুল... নিলে তুলি’ খোঁপা খুলি’ কুসুম-ডোর” (“all the flowers I gathered... you took them, loosening my hair and weaving a garland”). The movement from altar to body transforms ritual into eroticized contact, echoing the *śṛṅgāra* dynamics theorized by Bharata Muni, where sensory and emotional registers coalesce into aesthetic experience (Bharata 6.33). At the level of Vaishnava theology, Rupa Goswami’s account of *vipralambha* clarifies how such fleeting union intensifies subsequent longing, making separation itself the ground of heightened relish (De 231).

The dream’s collapse, “স্বপনে কী যে কয়েছি... জাগিয়া কেঁদে ডাকি” (“what I said in the dream... waking, I weep and call”), restores absence, structuring desire as recurrence rather than completion. This pattern resonates with Jacques Lacan’s claim that desire is organized around lack and sustained by deferral (Lacan 235), and with Gaston Bachelard’s notion of oneiric images as intensifiers of intimate space that vanish on waking (Bachelard 29). Within Indian aesthetics, Abhinavagupta’s elaboration of *rasa* explains how such oscillation yields a distilled savoring of emotion beyond empirical reality (Gnoli 148), while Anandavardhana’s *dhvani* theory accounts for the suggestive excess that exceeds literal statement (Ingalls 95). Further, the *Advaita Vedanta* inflects this ephemerality: the beloved’s presence appears as a fleeting manifestation within consciousness, leaving behind an intensified awareness of separation. Together, these frameworks reveal Nazrul’s poetics as one where dream-union is not fulfilment but a catalytic interval that deepens longing and sustains sensuous devotion.

Krishna in these selected lyrics emerges as an elusive and ungraspable presence, one whose identity is constantly dispersed across shifting geographies and emotional registers. He is not anchored in a single space but moves between Braj, Mathura, and Dwaraka, creating a narrative geography of absence that resists fixation. This dispersal transforms him into a figure of perpetual deferral, where the beloved is always invoked but never fully located, reinforcing the structure of longing as constitutive of devotion. Such a configuration resonates with Jacques Derrida’s notion of *différance*, where meaning is

perpetually postponed and never fully present, existing only through traces and absence (Derrida 21).

This sense of elusiveness is further intensified through Nazrul’s deployment of nature imagery, which functions as an emotional extension of the devotee’s interior state. The Yamuna’s waters, monsoon clouds, night skies, and trembling winds become affective landscapes that mirror the instability of desire. In “ওরে নীল যমুনার জল! বল রে মোরে বল” (“O blue waters of the Yamuna, tell me, tell me”), the river is not merely a setting but a speaking witness to absence, carrying the burden of unanswered longing. Similarly, the recurrent invocation of “শ্রাবণ-মেঘ” (monsoon clouds) in “মোর ঘুমঘোরে এলে মনোহর” (“In my drowsy sleep you came, O Enchanter”) evokes a sensory atmosphere where sound, movement, and moisture become metaphors for emotional turbulence. The night itself in “প্রিয় এমন রাত যেন যায় না বৃথাই” (“Let not such a dear night pass in vain”) is charged with expectancy, functioning as a temporal container for desire.

Across the selected lyrics, Nazrul’s use of natural imagery extends beyond the already noted river, monsoon, and nightscape, forming a dense sensory field through which emotion is externalized and intensified. In “ব্রজ গোপী খেলে হোরী” (“The maidens of Braj play Holi”), the imagery of অশোক ফুল (ashoka blossoms) and ভ্রমর গুঞ্জন (the humming of bees) creates a springtime ecology where desire becomes organically embedded in nature. The flowering of ashoka is not merely decorative but suggests erotic blooming, aligning with classical Sanskrit poetics where seasonal nature mirrors emotional states (states) of *śṛṅgāra rasa* (Bharata 6.40). The bee’s humming, traditionally associated with longing in Indian lyric tradition, further amplifies the motif of restless desire seeking its object.

Similarly, in “মোর ঘুমঘোরে এলে মনোহর” (“In my drowsy sleep you came, O Enchanter”), the reference to নীপ-সম (kadamba-like bloom) transforms the body into a flowering landscape, suggesting a porous boundary between human and vegetal forms. The kadamba tree, deeply associated with Krishna iconography, functions here as a symbolic extension of divine intimacy, where nature participates in the aesthetics of devotion rather than merely framing it.

In “প্রিয় এমন রাত যেন যায় না বৃথাই” (“Let not such a dear night pass in vain”), the চাঁপা ফুল (champa flower) and কুসুম (blossoms) serve as delicate markers of anticipation and sensual preparation, reinforcing the idea that floral imagery operates as a medium of *भावत्मक* (affective) transition. From a theoretical standpoint,

Anandavardhana's *dhvani* theory explains how such images generate implied emotional resonance beyond literal meaning (Ingalls 107), while Abhinavagupta emphasizes their role in aestheticized emotional consciousness, where nature becomes *sahridaya* (emotionally attuned) with the subject (Gnoli 156). Thus, these floral and faunal imageries deepen Nazrul's poetics of desire by embedding *Madhura Bhava* within an ecologically charged, sensuous world.

Within Indian aesthetic theory, Abhinavagupta's articulation of *rasa* explains how such external landscapes are internalized as emotional experience, allowing nature to become *sahridaya* (emotionally attuned) with the devotee's consciousness (Gnoli 152). Likewise, Anandavardhana's theory of *dhvani* underscores how these natural images operate suggestively, pointing beyond literal description toward deeper emotional states (Ingalls 103). From a Western philosophical lens, Martin Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world further clarifies how environment and self are inseparable, with nature functioning as an existential extension of lived experience (Heidegger 91). Additionally, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on embodied perception illuminates how sensory engagement with wind, water, and sound structures the devotee's consciousness as inherently relational (Merleau-Ponty 240).

Thus, Nazrul constructs a poetic universe where Krishna's absence is not a void but a productive force. Through dispersal, nature imagery, and affective extension, presence becomes momentary and unstable, while absence persists as the enduring condition that generates and sustains devotional intensity.

VI. CONCLUSION: REIMAGINING DEVOTION AS DESIRE

The preceding analysis of selected lyrics by Kazi Nazrul Islam demonstrates that *Madhura Bhava* operates in his poetic imagination as a sustained fusion of the sacred and the sensual, where devotional experience is inseparable from embodied desire. Across the lyrical spectrum, devotion is neither abstract nor purely ritualistic; rather, it is continuously mediated through bodily imagery, emotional intensity, and sensuous perception. This alignment with the Bhakti Movement reveals how Nazrul inherits a long-standing aesthetic tradition in which *prema* (love) becomes a legitimate pathway to the divine, yet simultaneously reconfigures it through a modern psychological depth.

A key finding of this study is the emergence of Radha as a psychologically complex subject rather than a static devotional emblem. Her voice is constructed through layers of anticipation, introspection, and affective endurance, positioning her as an active site of emotional

production. This aligns with Luce Irigaray's notion of feminine subjectivity as fluid and relational, where identity is formed through shifting dynamics of desire and absence (Irigaray 83). Radha's emotional world is thus neither passive nor derivative but constitutes a self-sustaining field of *anubhava* (experience), where longing becomes constitutive of being.

Central to this configuration is the role of longing (*viraha*) as the dominant mode of devotion. Rather than culminating in stable union, devotion is structured through continual deferral, where absence intensifies emotional depth. This resonates with Jacques Lacan's formulation of desire as rooted in lack, perpetually sustained through unattainable objects (Lacan 276). Within the Indian aesthetic tradition, Abhinavagupta further clarifies that such emotional oscillation is not a deficiency but the very condition for *rasa* experience, where aesthetic consciousness is heightened through relational tension (Gnoli 164).

Ultimately, Nazrul's reimagining of devotion transforms *Madhura Bhava* into an experiential and affective continuum in which sacred love is lived through the body, articulated through emotion, and sustained through absence. The Radha-Krishna dynamic thus becomes a site of ongoing psychological and aesthetic negotiation, where desire itself emerges as the central principle of devotional life.

The analysis of selected lyrical compositions by Kazi Nazrul Islam ultimately demonstrates a significant reconfiguration of the Radha-Krishna dynamic, wherein traditional devotional structures are internalized into a deeply reflective feminine consciousness. Rather than presenting Radha as a fixed icon of surrender, Nazrul's poetic imagination constructs her as a dynamic subject whose emotional world is shaped through continuous processes of longing, memory, anticipation, and imaginative union. This inward turn signals a shift from externalized mythic narration to interior psychological articulation, where devotion becomes a lived, affective experience rather than a purely doctrinal expression.

Within the broader framework of the Bhakti Movement, such a transformation is particularly significant, as it extends the classical model of *Madhura Bhava* into a modern register of subjectivity. The devotional relationship is no longer confined to ritual or allegory but is re-situated within the emotional and sensory interior of the devotee. The feminine voice, in this context, emerges not as secondary but as constitutive, producing meaning through acts of yearning and emotional articulation. This aligns with Simone de Beauvoir's insight that subjectivity is formed through lived experience and relational positioning, where

identity is continually shaped in relation to the other (Beauvoir 689).

At the same time, the persistent emphasis on absence and desire underscores how devotion in Nazrul's lyric world is structured through emotional intensity rather than fulfilment. This recalls Jacques Lacan's formulation of desire as perpetually deferred, sustained by lack rather than resolution (Lacan 278). Yet, in contrast to purely psychoanalytic frameworks, Nazrul's poetry transforms this lack into an aesthetic and spiritual condition, where absence becomes a productive space for imagination, sensuousness, and affective depth.

Consequently, Nazrul modernizes the Radha–Krishna dynamic by internalizing it into feminine consciousness, thereby transforming devotion into something deeply intimate, embodied, and emotionally charged. The divine is no longer an external object of worship alone but a presence that permeates thought, body, and feeling.

In Nazrul's lyric universe, the divine is not merely worshipped, it is desired, awaited, and felt in absence as much as in presence.

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